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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CE JAMIE MOORE

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SUBJECT: 200 CIVIL SERVICE JOBS FOR ROMA -- HUNGARIAN STYLE
AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

¶1. (U) Summary: Despite the public service hiring freeze, the GOH launched an affirmative action project that aims to induct 200 Roma college graduates into civil service positions by January 1, 2010. EU grants will cover salaries for the first year, after which the GOH hopes to add the new employees permanently to their roles. Opposition party representatives threaten to relieve the new hires promptly following their anticipated election win in April. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On September 19, PM Bajnai announced a new and "tangible" Roma integration program. The program includes eradicating 100 decrepit Roma settlements, reviving 100 after school educational institutions called "tanodas," and hiring 200 Roma professionals into the civil service. Though several interlocutors have expressed their doubts, the Government Center for Public Administration and Human Resource Services (KSZK) has set an aggressive schedule for this first-time affirmative action-like effort.

¶3. (U) Of the nearly 500 applicants, 287 met the initial criteria and are required to pass a civil service exam before being placed. On November 12, KSZK held a seminar in Budapest to lay out the timeline for testing and hiring. The large hall was packed with attentive Roma applicants from all corners of the country. The Minister of the Prime Minister's Office, Csaba Molnar, told the crowd that the government needs talented, well-prepared people to take part in the service of their homeland. "You will not be just a civil servant, but role models to your people." He explained that this program was a big step toward resolving "the most important social problem since the change of the system, the Gypsy issue."

¶4. (U) The timeline is short. To prepare for the recently introduced civil service exam, applicants may participate in a web-based module. The test, which has written and oral sections, will be offered in early December. The project director, Istvan Templen, told the crowd that, "many of you will be assigned by January first." While the bulk of the positions will be in Budapest, KSZK is surveying vacancies at the 13 regional government offices.

¶5. (SBU) In Hungary, where ethnicity is private information, some observers believe this program is anti-equal opportunity and potentially illegal. In a center-right party (FIDESZ)-led Budapest Atlantic Forum breakfast meeting last month, Parliament's Human Rights Committee Chairman, Zoltan Balog, deemed the program a "very bad solution." Balog claimed that the Socialists were using the initiative as a campaign tool. Though Balog was receptive to the targeted recruiting of Roma for police positions, he stated that, "this hiring practice for civil service jobs discriminates against white Hungarians." He alluded that newly hired Roma will only be on the government rolls for four months (Note: Until after the April national elections, which the opposition center-right Fidesz party is widely expected to win. End

Note).

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Politics aside, the room at the recent KSZK seminar was packed with hopeful and encouraged Roma college graduates -- who represent a mere one percent of the Roma population. Despite a vocal opposition, it appears that the Roma civil servants will be hired four months before the general election next spring, leaving the new, likely center-right, government faced with a fait accompli. End comment.

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